

Do You Want to Ask my Avatar? A Real Life Librarian in a Virtual World

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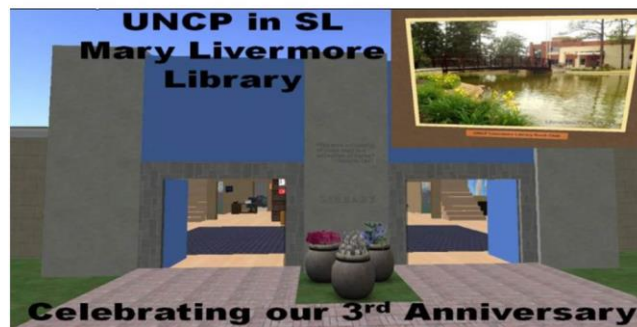
The University of North Carolina at Pembroke.



UNCP in Second Life - Mary Livermore Library - Celebrating Our 3rd Anniversary

The University of North Carolina at Pembroke has a large-scale campus in the virtual world where academic colleagues from the real-life institution use the facilities to teach a variety of RL classes, convene faculty development seminars, and produce grid-wide educational meetings, symposia, colloquia and conferences. The UNCP in SL campus has some 50 buildings and outdoor learning sites. Dr. Anthony Curtis (aka in world as Stone Semyorka), a professor in the UNCP Department of Mass Communication, is director of the campus.

<http://www.uncp.edu/home/acurtis/NewMedia/SecondLife/WhatsOnCampusInSL.html>



Library opens for business in 2010

While our building was in existence, actual library services did not begin until fall 2010. At that time, at the invitation of Dr. Curtis, I began providing reference librarian office hours in world, with Second Life messages sent to me via email when I was offline to alert me if a patron needed assistance. Reference assistance is given using the interactive board behind the circulation desk, which links out to the UNCP library's online resources through a web browser. Unfortunately, due to the lack of provisions in most of our licenses for virtual world use, we cannot make this information directly available in Second life without the need for an additional interface due to an inability to provide for authentication. Patrons may also access these resources asynchronously without the need for mediation. However, office hours are posted for those patrons that wish to have live assistance.

I also worked with a team of librarians to create video tutorials to be streamed in world in our video viewing area. Our classroom provides an area for synchronous instruction. It is outfitted with a presentation board that can be used much as the one I am using for this presentation. At the back part of the classroom is our book club area. Three book club events have been held this year, with our fourth next week. Each has consisted of a poetry night, a story-telling night, and the actual book discussion. Clicking on the blue and white signs gives a note card with a calendar of events and an invite to the book club events group in order to receive notices of events in the future. We also have an outdoor amphitheatre for larger groups, which also includes a presentation board.



New Directions

I've learned a lot during this academic year about library services in Second Life, and it has informed my decisions for where I'd like to see our services go next year. I want to continue our book club, but include selections that coordinate with literature courses, thus providing a more direct link to student learning outcomes. I will continue to collaborate with other librarians to expand our selection of video tutorials. I am also planning to develop special collections exhibits in Second Life that feature pictures and media related to the institutions heritage as a traditionally Native American institution. The recently digitized Elmer Hunt photograph collection is the first exhibit in the works. I'd also like to provide more instruction ñ less focused on bibliographic instruction, though we are happy to provide

those classes ñ but also classes on Second Life related topics such as editing items, maintaining inventory, and places in Second Life to visit based on thematic topics that are tied to university courses. Educators have created sims for almost every academic subject. Often times people don't stay with Second Life because they don't find a niche of interest to them ñ I want to provide resources that help direct those people to the places and groups that fit their interests in hopes that they will see the educational value therein.

(Footnote - Yes - I'm a gLeek.)



It's a World of Pure Imagination

Libraries and the services they offer also need to find a niche - something to make it different and better. The nice thing about Second Life is that the experience doesn't have to mimic bricks and mortar. Explore possibilities and nontraditional settings. One of my favorites is the tiki village library on UNCW's campus. Not only is it possible to let your imagination run wild, but there can be downfalls to the traditional Carnegie style in Second Life. There are often navigation and viewing difficulties, walls and roofs can be problematic, and entrances are often too narrow. Greenhill (2008) states that "attempts to replicate real life actually [jars] people out of the immersive experience." In Second Life these niches often surround collaborate around a subject rather than geography - e.g. health services, science fiction, mystery, storytelling (Seanchai library), Egypt (Temple Library of Seshat), the Tolkien Library, and the Caledon 19th century library.

(Footnote - Thank you Willy Wonka)



Touch Maps for Information

There are libraries that are more general, and often work because they comprise areas of different interest. An example of this is the Community Virtual Library. It is an archipelago. These maps, which are on display at the Info Island reference desk, are interactive. Touching a building on the map tells you its name and gives you the option to teleport to that location or obtain a landmark. Running a library of this size is accomplished through the cooperation of librarians from all over the world, who provide reference desk coverage, events programming, and classes on a variety of topics. Their general Travelogue group, of which I am a member, just began giving topic tours, which led to my idea to do course specific versions of these tours. Not only are Second Libraries an avenue to connect with patrons, but also a valuable networking opportunity. As networking opportunities it is important you have a professional avatar and that you join groups in your interest to network with other professionals. There are a number of library groups and other academic groups that can be found using Second Life's search feature. Establishing an interest group for your Second Life library will help to aid in communications, working much as an email discussion list inside the Second Life framework.



Differences between SL and RL

As with any change in medium there are differences between Second Life and Real Life reference. There are communication difficulties - which vary depending on whether using voice or text, as each has its own technical foibles at time. Librarians have to be flexible and ready to work with either, as well as provide emotes for those conversational clues that are lost without face to face communication, such as nodding or smiling. On the plus side Second Life provides patron anonymity while still having a visual component instead of being a disembodied chat window. People want face to face communication, but are shy or intimidated approaching librarians in real life. There are also those patrons who may be unable to come to the library for physical or geographical reasons. One improvement of Second Life over Real Life libraries is the ability to exhibit three dimensionally our own unique items and places for those that cannot experience another way. This allows us to step out of our immediate realm of users and invite service opportunities from people that have an interest in the unique niche of our library from all over the world. A further distinction is often instead of the student wondering around aimlessly that we sense needs help, Second Life users are more willing to ask for help (though there are still the aimless wanderers). Additionally, when they ask a question they want an immediate answer. People can come and go very rapidly in Second Life. Due to the social nature of Second Life there is an increased need to multitask. Not only are the interactions much faster paced, but most questions are avatar to avatar, so once you help people you are essentially always on call when you log in. To solve that when I need to log in to get work done, it's nice to have an avatar that is friendless or friend-lite for working without interruptions. Further, librarians in Second Life need to utilize open source resources, as most vendors don't make provision for full text in virtual world. This means maintaining a bank of known resources that are perhaps different from those offered by your real life library. However, check first ñ you may be surprised how many open source resources are already at your disposal.



Where Learning Gets Personal

- Greenhill (2008) As librarians have experimented with library services in Second Life, the focus has moved from collections of information resources to libraries as a social hub, places to meet, and training in a similar way to the metamorphosis of our real life libraries in the past 20 years.
- Peters (2007) It is entirely possible that libraries in Second Life will be more about exhibits, events, and services than about collections metadata and archiving initiatives.

Moving ahead with library services in or any academic endeavor there are things to consider. Can and will patrons access Second Life and does it meet a need? Does the real life library building have Second Life capable computers? What is the purpose of the Second Life services? What funding exists for Second Life services? In our case we had patrons on campus that were already using Second Life in coursework, so we wanted to tie into those current users and expand to others. We wanted to meet library patrons where they were doing their coursework in order to have those opportunely timed learning moments. We received grant money this year to fund the purchase of Second Life capable computers, which will hopefully make Second Life more accessible for our community. Our funding is incredibly limited, but I have been able to make contributions, as well as earned money in trivia contests and the ALA Banned Books Week Jeopardy contest. I also have become expert at shopping for free and bargain items.

There are so many opportunities for library services. While these can be synchronous or asynchronous, the "face to face" interactions in Second Life are often much more productive. Be available! Possible service options are reference, outreach (writer's talks, book talks, visits from well-known figures in science/history), collections (external and internal), and classes and seminars (for librarians, students, faculty, everyone, on using Second Life, etc.). However, don't forget to include casual social events. Anything including dancing and/or being outdoors are bonuses. They tend to serve as the refreshments of Second Life, and as in real life they will draw in attendees to other programming as well. Themes events and costumes are also big hits. What doesn't work well in Second Life are static collections with no people, impersonal how-to guides, and solo exploration, all underscoring the importance of the social interaction in a virtual world.

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Tang, Florence. Second Life complements the Internet for reference librarians. *Georgia Library Quarterly*, Fall 2009, 10-16.

Presentation title a la The Guild's Do You Want to Date My Avatar.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urNyg1ftMIU>

<http://www.watchtheguild.com/>

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